

Joe Biden owns this disastrous exit, plain and simple. But, also, Secretary Austin, Secretary Blinken, and General Milley are not without blame.

The exit has realized the worst fears of every Afghan who, over 20 years, learned to dream of peace, and every naysayer who said: Wait, and they will leave. Our enemies were right, and now we have left.

The Biden administration certainly left the women of Afghanistan behind. They are once again being beaten, killed in the streets for supposed crimes, such as daring to speak, wanting an education, not covering their faces, and, in some cases, simply walking in public.

The Biden administration, in its hasty exit, effectively armed the Taliban with advanced American military weaponry that is now being used to oppress the Afghan people. The Taliban is now patrolling our streets in Kabul in American vehicles, wearing American uniforms, and carrying American-made weapons.

Some of the violent terrorists released by the Obama administration are now in political leadership roles in this Taliban regime. Other members of the Taliban leadership have remained on the FBI's most wanted list, and they have been on that list for many years, including one with a \$10 million bounty. Now, if this were a movie script, nobody would believe it.

In addition to the equipment and the funds, it is crucial that we remember the human cost in Afghanistan. We lost 2,461 servicemembers, 18 of whom came from my State of Iowa. We also lost 3,846 contractors, 66,000 American military and police, 1,144 allied servicemembers, 444 aid workers, and 72 journalists. These numbers hit home. They hit deep. And we should never forget them.

These numbers also don't account for the stain on our national reputation for blatantly disregarding the welfare of the Afghan people who fought alongside us to help us accomplish our mission there. Leaving behind allies will have consequences that will affect our ability to build coalitions in the future. It will negatively impact our ability to defeat future enemies.

Looking through the negatives, the heartache and the pain that our country has suffered from this terribly executed exit, I remain hopeful. Where the Biden administration has failed, we have seen veterans and current mem-

bers of our armed services filling the leadership gap. Where our government didn't keep its promise by working together, these veterans and current members of our armed services and the groups associated with them quickly built ad hoc networks to ensure their Afghan brothers-in-arms and their families were able to leave their crumbling country safely.

Americans have been inspired by reports of Operation Pineapple Express, organized by special operations veterans who, without even being asked or without even asking for permission, helped hundreds of Afghan allies and their families to safety.

One of the more inspiring stories from this disastrous exit involved an Afghan family being guided by his former U.S. marine brother to Abbey Gate at the Kabul airport. The Afghan family was instructed by the U.S. Marine veterans to carry signs with them that invoked Marine Corps phrases that our marines at Abbey Gate would understand but the Taliban would not understand.

After several attempts, the marines on the wall saw the signs and were able to retrieve the family and escort them through Abbey Gate only moments before the suicide attack that took the lives of 11 marines, a Navy corpsman, a U.S. soldier, and scores and scores of Afghan civilians.

When the Marine Corps veteran network was eventually able to make contact with the interpreter, he was asked if he and his family were all right. His reply was, "Of course I'm good. I'm with marines."

Now, that is just one story, but this isn't the only amazing story regarding our veterans and our servicemembers. Pictures that were taken during this time show the desperation of the Afghan people: mothers desperately throwing their children to American troops in the hope that even if the parents couldn't reach safety, their children could. These pictures also show the pure hearts of these American warriors whom we honor.

During this 20-year conflict, our service men and women have never wavered in their duty to God and country, consistently showing their ability to annihilate the enemy. They defeated the Taliban, liberated the people of Afghanistan, and protected our country from further terrorist attacks for 20 years.

During their final hours in Kabul, our young warriors did something unimagi-

nable for almost any other country's military: They injected humanity into the dark fringes of a war-torn conflict during a mass evacuation. We have seen the pictures of marines in full battle attire holding crying infants. We have seen our servicemembers giving the shirts off their backs to keep children warm. This stands in contrast to the actions of political leaders thousands of miles away here, where we stand this very day.

Despite the Taliban's most recent acts of barbarism, the Biden administration has begun discussing potential recognition of the Taliban as a government. The possibility of taxpayer-funded foreign aid has been dangled as a carrot to incentivize their good behavior. This is pure naivete on the part of anybody in this administration thinking about that.

The Biden administration's string of foreign policy blunders has created a domino effect that Americans will feel for years to come. Afghanistan could once again become the epicenter for terrorist activities that will launch future attacks on our Nation—hopefully not another 9/11. I pray that my concerns will not become reality, but somehow I have to have fear that they will be reality. At the very least, Americans' credibility on the world stage with our allies, even with our enemies, has taken a huge hit.

In the unfortunate event that our worst fears come to light, my solace is in the knowledge that our service men and women continue to have the strength to overcome the failures of our own political leaders.

So, to my fellow Americans, let us never forget the sacrifices of our men and women in the armed services and the sacrifices that that means for protecting our freedom and security. Their service and sacrifice have been of immeasurable value. All Americans owe a debt to them that can never fully be repaid.

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ADJOURNMENT UNTIL 10:15 A.M.  
TOMORROW

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate stands adjourned until 10:15 a.m. tomorrow.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 1:54 p.m., adjourned until Thursday, September 16, 2021, at 10:15 a.m.